



DURBAN LETTER

Information for the community served by the United States Consulate General in Durban

April 2004

Ambassador's "Self-Help" Program in KZN

Ambassador Cameron Hume hosted the Special Self-Help (SSH) program awards ceremony to honor those individuals who have dedicated themselves to improving the lives of their communities in KZN and parts of the Eastern Cape through the accomplishment of SSH projects. The occasion was also used to announce the recipients identified for funding during 2003.

KwaZulu-Natal's Premier, Lionel Mtshali, National Minister of Home Affairs, Mangosuthu Buthelezi, and Ethekwini Metro Deputy Mayor Logie Naidoo were present to witness this important event held last December.

The Ambassador's "Special Self-Help" program, funded by resources from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), plays an important role in helping local communities, willing to help themselves achieve community goals and better their lives through such small projects. The latest projects have a particular focus on communities combating the HIV/ AIDS scourge in KZN.



Ambassador Hume views projects displayed by recipients of the "Special Self-Help" program funds in KwaZulu-Natal and Eastern Cape

Over the years, the program has assisted thousands of disadvantaged South Africans to improve their communities with skills such as brick making, sewing, etc. The SSH program, inter alia, enables communities to initiate many useful community services such as child care centers and, more recently, networks for HIV/ AIDS home-based care.

For the period 2002-2003, the program dispensed some USD \$300,000 (more than R2 million), in helping 35 community projects throughout KwaZulu-Natal and parts of the Eastern Cape.

The SSH Coordinator from the Consulate General visits dozens of sites, many in distant rural areas, to not only evaluate projects and applicants to determine both their viability and reliability, but also to assess progress and completion of these within the USG guidelines.

Such site visits are an important part of project implementation and help ensure that the programs are self-sustaining, as intended. Such visits also allow the Consulate staff to maintain contact with people in the rural areas so as to better understand grassroots concerns.

Last year the program run from Durban received over 100 applications, evidence of the program's popularity, and the high reputation that it enjoys.

IRC/Durban Facilitates DVC for Academic Libraries

Twelve university librarians (Library Directors) in the KwaZulu-Natal province, associated with the Eastern Seaboard Association of Libraries (esAL), attended a Digital Video Conference (DVC) organized by IRC in February. esAL represents a cooperation agreement among libraries within the region of KwaZulu-Natal, signed between librarians and Vice Chancellors of Tertiary Institutions (i.e. technikons and universities). Their aim is to create a common, effective, cost-efficient library system for students and academics in the region.

The primary focus of the DVC sponsored by PAS was to have participants discuss the purchase of a new library integrated system that the participating universities would share. Two speakers from the U.S., one from North Carolina State Library, which uses the UNICORN integrated system and the other from New York Public Library, using the Millennium library integrated system, shared their views with some 20 participants here.

Both speakers were insightful in their presentations. They provided local librarians with observations about their product's utility, training and technical support needs provided by the company, and other important issues that would help esAL members decide on the right product for their needs.

"Project Citizen: South Africa" showcase and conference in Howick

Last December, KwaZulu-Natal learners participated in the first annual provincial gathering of schools implementing "Project Citizen: South Africa", funded by U.S. Department of Education and administered by the Center for Civic Education in California and the Bowling Green State University in Ohio.

“Project Citizen: South Africa” is a civic education program aimed at young learners to encourage them to participate competently and responsibly in local and national government affairs.

It actively engages young people to learn how to monitor and influence public policy and community affairs.

The project is designed to have young people work together, in class groups, to identify and study a public policy issue of their choice. The class is then divided into four teams that operate in an interactive and collegial process. Each team undertakes specific tasks related to the pre-selected policy issue. The final product is a portfolio, which reflects each group’s contribution. Such activity encourages civic participation among learners, their parents and members of the community.

The level of excellence displayed by the learners that PAS observed indicates the high degree of research that went to the preparation for the event. Presentations touched on all matter of challenges that face present-day South African society, to include drug abuse, rape, HIV/AIDS, crime and poverty.

Schools from Pietermaritzburg, Durban, Empangeni, Vryheid, Ulundi and Port Shepstone Education Regions participated in the showcase event.

Precedent-setting HIV/ AIDS Workshop

Ambassador Hume officially opened the PAS-funded, inaugural two-day workshop on HIV/ AIDS at the Nelson R. Mandela School of Medicine of the University of KwaZulu-Natal in March.



Ambassador Hume called for more cooperation between traditional healers and medical doctors in the fight against HIV/ AIDS

Some 200 traditional healers from across the province of KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) gathered at the school to share their experiences with biomedical community. It was fitting that the Steve Biko Theater was chosen as the venue for this historic gathering. A civil right activist and former student at the Medical school, Biko worked hard and later sacrificed his life to secure

improved lives for poor and otherwise marginalized people.

American keynote speaker, Dr. Jack Killen, Director of the Office of International Health Research at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Center for Complimentary and Alternative Medicine in Washington, delivered a spirited address.

Another invitee of note, senior charismatic and spiritual leader for traditional healers, Credo Mutwa urged participants to talk openly about HIV/ AIDS and fight the stigma prevalent in communities. He himself set an example for candor. He revealed the loss of one of his sons, a budding soccer star, to HIV/AIDS and the seropositivity of three other of his children to a riveted audience.

Overall, the workshop provided healers an opportunity to learn about new and advanced HIV testing methods, government referral forms for patients, etc. Speakers and participants all agreed that a major step had been taken in dispelling mistrust and forging a cooperative partnership between traditional healers and medical doctors in the fight against HIV/ AIDS.

A joint task force was agreed upon that will include 11 traditional healers (one per district in KZN). Provincial MEC for Health, Zweli Mkhize praised the initiative and encouraged both the biomedical sector and traditional healers to begin to learn and share expertise for the benefit of patients.

Ambassador Hume reiterated the USG’s commitment to working with all stakeholders to win the war against HIV/ AIDS. “It is a welcome opportunity for the Embassy to be able to cooperate and build bridges between traditional health care givers and the biomedical profession in SA.

“A combined expertise, shared information and experience from many quarters will ensure that maximum assistance is given to people in need,” said Hume.

South Africa Education Transformation Institute (SETI) alumni association launched in KwaZulu-Natal

In March, former KZN grantees of the South Africa Education Transformation Institute (SETI) launched the first local SETI alumni association in South Africa, with a branch for KwaZulu-Natal (KZN).

SETI, now in its 18th year here, with 500 South African grantees, provides a 6-week summer program in content-based English teaching for South African educators at an American university, focusing on content such as Democracy, HIV-AIDS awareness, entrepreneurship and other civic education issues.

During the meeting for the alumni launch, one SETI alumnus made a presentation on "Children's Rights and

Responsibilities” with a textbook project involving six schools in KZN. Building on small successes, the SETI alumni group -planned for a countrywide newsletter release in June.

The SETI KZN Alumni group will begin facilitation of its Association’s activities with the publications of a bi-annual newsletter. It is hoped the first edition will be time with organizing the pre-departure orientation programs for the next batch of outgoing KZN SETI grantees. Its ultimate objective is to expand the SETI network in KZN and, serve as an example to SETI grantees working in other South African provinces.

PAS commemorates African American History Month (February 2004)

PAS Durban hosted African American History Month (Black History Month) with two separate commemoration events in Empangeni and in Port Shepstone. Local Department of Education officials were also on hand to lend support.



PAO delivered a motivational address on the origins of the celebration in the U.S. and a video entitled “Great American – Martin Luther King Jr.” was shown to some 300 high school students.

This was followed by a Q&A session, which concluded with PAO making donations of Black History thematic books to participating schools.

The two events provided an opportunity to share mutually held cultural values, underlining the importance of democratic values, and focusing on youth.

Digital Video Conference (DVC) on Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) and the Environment

On February 10, Durban participated in a Digital Video Conference (DVC) on Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) and the Environment, which was attended by local environmental journalists and the regional director and expert from a locally based Biotechnology Consortium, “Ecobio”.

Special guests in the U.S., were Jonathan Rauch, an independent journalist and writer-in residence at the Brookings Institute; David Sandalow, Vice President for

Conservation Programs at the World Wildlife Fund and Alex Avery, Director of Research and Education, Center for Global Food Issues at Hudson Institute.

Jonathan Rauch cleared the misperception that America was dumping GMO foods in Africa, saying the number of GMO products found in the US was widespread, safe and consumed by the public.

Other participants in the DVC included Embassy Windhoek and the Consulate General in Cape Town. The discussion afforded all attendees an opportunity to learn more about this much misunderstood subject. Although some people maintained different views, all agreed that it the DVC constituted a transparent and very useful exercise.

Donation of 100 pairs of basketball sneakers to disadvantaged youths

CG Michael Thurston, together with the PAO, Liam Humphreys concluded the transfer, in February, of a donation of 100 pairs of new basketball sneakers from the NBA, to players and coaches from a Durban based NGO known as “Playing for Peace” (PFP).

PFP, through a love for the game of basketball, interacts with thousands of youths from Durban’s inner city, suburbs, and surrounding towns and townships.



CG and PAO handed sneakers to youngsters who won the 2003 basketball tournament organized by PFP

The game of basketball enables PFP to provide its young charges with life skills training, in addition to the opportunity for them to improve their playing skills of a sport that is fast growing in popularity here, across race, gender and other lines of social separation.

Jazz Ambassadors give Durban audiences memorable performances

In March, the highly talented Jay Klum/Bill Heid quartet, also known by its State Department traveling label, as the Jazz Ambassadors, entertained local music lovers in Durban for 3 days, in a cultural exchange program that showcased American jazz culture.

The group shared their expertise with local artists and audiences at several venues. Workshops were held with

young people from Umlazi, a disadvantaged local township, and jazz students from University of KwaZulu-Natal and the Durban Institute of Technology. A number of independent local artists and students also got an opportunity to share the stage with the Jazz Ambassadors.

In their final concert at the jazz center, before a capacity crowd of over 250 music lovers, the Ambassadors dedicated several songs to young people they had met in KZN, as a tribute to the youthful enthusiasm and talent they encountered here.

HIV/ AIDS awareness program at KwaMashu

PAS Durban and KwaMashu Community Resource Center co-hosted a successful HIV/AIDS awareness program in KwaMashu Township's Methodist Church in March. About 150 people attended the screening of a feature length documentary, "A Closer Walk", that depicts humankind's confrontation with global AIDS epidemic.

The audience consisted of different sectors of the community, including students, church representatives, community-based non-governmental organizations and municipality councilors.

The film is narrated by Glenn Close and Will Smith. After the showing of the film, the audience was invited to discuss and raise questions on the movie and HIV/AIDS.

The message that came out clearly in the discussion was that communities needed to speak more openly about the disease and break down the stigma.

U.S. Fulbright Exchange Teacher raises funds to build a basketball court

When Ken Mukai arrived in January from the U.S. as a Fulbrighter to teach science at Nsalamanga High School in Maputaland, northern KwaZulu-Natal, he was surprised and troubled to see that learners did not have much opportunity for extracurricular activities after school.

"We start at 07h45 and finish the day around 2pm, then just about all the learners head for home," he said, "I got an idea for a basketball court where all children can get together after school and enjoy the sport."

Mukai is in South Africa on a Fulbright Teacher Exchange Program. Each year, educators from the U.S. and more than 24 countries participate in this program which involves one-on-one exchanges, between secondary and tertiary teachers from U.S. and the partner nation.

These teachers exchange places and often live in each other's homes, while continuing to receive salaries from their own institutions while teaching overseas.

In Nsalamanga, the school community and department of education have already approved the building of the first basketball court in the area, and learners are eagerly waiting for the commencement of the project.

Since Mukai is in the country for a year, he hopes to be able to help raise R70, 000 in that time, through the NBA and other private donors, to cover the cost of material and labor to build the court. He is also working on donations of basketball equipment and gear from his community in California, necessary to start the program.

"Basketball is a wonderful game, I hope that learners will be able to gain discipline, teamwork and the importance of hard work," he said, "I'm always amazed at how the community and the school manage to survive with such little resources."

For more information call: Ken Mukai (035) 592 0362 / 083 734 7547) or Bethuel Mthembu (035) 574 8334 / 083 734 7547)

Educational advising at the Consulate on studying in the U.S.

If you would like to learn more about study opportunities in the U.S., please join us for a group session.

Group Sessions are held every Monday at 3pm. No appointment is necessary but a call to signal your wish to attend is appreciated. Sessions are free. All the information you need is available for all levels of university education. Exam information is also available, including SAT, GRE, GMAT, TSE and TOEFEL registration bulletin and study guides.

After the group session, if you feel you need more information, you can make an individual appointment with our educational advisor, Roberta Paola. The advising library contains university catalogues and videos as well as Internet and database computer access.

Visa-issuing office launches US-VISIT

The visa office launched a biometric data collection program in February, with a demonstration for local media, of the new fingerscan equipment that is currently being implemented worldwide by all visa-issuing offices.

The program aims to enhance security while facilitating legitimate travel and trade through U.S. borders. The new program requires that visitors between the ages of 14 – 79 traveling to the U.S. have their index fingers scanned in order to verify identity at the port of entry.

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